

Quality Review Report 2011-2012

Discovery High School
High school X549

2780 RESERVOIR AVENUE
BRONX
NY 10468

Principal: ROLANDO RIVERA

Dates of review: February 07, 2012

Lead Reviewer: Elyse Doti

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Discovery High School is a high school with 507 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 22% Black, 72% Hispanic, 1% White, 2% Asian students and 1% other students. The student body includes 22% English language learners and 21% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 86.3%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well-developed.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal has created a learning community with a coherent vision including data based goals that are understood and supported by the entire school community. (3.1)
 - Dedicated teachers work hard to support students and plan well articulated lessons. They understand and work to implement the school's goals of infusing literacy based strategies into daily lessons, ensuring that students cite text based information to support claims and conduct action research within Grade Teams to support specifically targeted groups of students. The school community continues to work towards a long term goal of providing further differentiation for subgroups. Action plans exist for all operational and instructional goals to strategically drive the work forward. The principal meets regularly with teachers and staff members to communicate progress and support them in their work. As a result the school has been very successful in narrowing the achievement gap for their students. The school earned a total of nine extra credit points on their Progress Report. Significant progress has been made with students with disabilities. In the first semester 61% of SWD passed their math class and 58% passed their English classes. This represents a huge shift in the school as three years ago only 27% of SWD passed math and 31% passed English.
- The school leader makes strategic organizational decisions across all aspects of the school to support improvements in student learning outcomes. (1.3)
 - The school leader made purposeful scheduling decisions that allows for teacher teams to meet for 3 or more blocks of time each week to examine student work and instructional practice and improve instruction in order to ensure that all students are engaged in challenging academic tasks. As a result of teachers meeting and improving differentiation, more students are prepared to do challenging work. More students are on track for advanced regents diploma this year than ever before. This year 56% of students are on track to receive advanced Regents diplomas, more than double the number awarded last year.
 - The school leader recognizes the importance of having the right people on board who are aligned to the school's vision and understand the high expectations of the school leader. The principal has a detailed 13 step hiring process that ensures that candidates are able to understand the needs of students, plan thoughtful lessons aligned to data and standards, implement the lesson in ways that meet the students' needs and are reflective about their work. Existing teachers and those new to the school hold themselves accountable for progress of targeted students across grade level teams as well as for struggling students identified in each of their classes through an on-going goals setting process reviewed weekly during one-on-one instructional intensive meetings with school leaders.
- Across the school teachers consistently supplement summative data with the use of teacher created periodic assessments that provide a clear portrait of student mastery of key skills and are strategically used to inform curricular and instructional decisions. (2.2)
 - Every six weeks teachers administer periodic assessments that assess cumulative skills from the start of the year. There is an extensive analysis process that enables teachers to identify trends and struggling students. This

cycle for improvement, created by the school, outlines the specific process teacher teams and individual teachers use to analyze the results and identify corrective instruction for targeted groups of students. In the English Department, the analysis of periodic assessment results led to teachers identifying the need to introduce annotation as a key skill to support the work around understanding and identifying evidence in complex texts. As a result of receiving meaningful and actionable feedback on a regular basis, teachers have been able to modify instructional practices to meet students' needs and adjust curricular and instructional decisions. This has led to continued gains in Regents pass rates pushing the school to the very top, 100% of the city range in all 5 Regents subject areas last year and success on the latest round of periodic assessments. For example 100% of students passed the Integrated Algebra periodic assessment with 99% receiving scores of 80% or above. Similarly 97% of students passed the Global History periodic assessment with 73% scoring 80% or higher.

- School leaders and teacher peers effectively use the observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of student work to provide feedback that accurately captures strengths, challenges and next steps that elevate instructional practices. (4.1)
 - o Very frequent observations coupled with weekly intensives (one on one meetings with school leadership) that include examining lessons, periodic assessments and student work, ensures that teachers are well supported in their development. Teachers set goals for their professional practice that are closely monitored during weekly intensive meetings and classroom observations. Teachers participate in Learning Walks where they look for evidence across the school of the Instructional Matrix (a staff created set of expectations aligned to Danielson) as well as the integration of Common Core skills. Teachers provide feedback to each other in this process. The Summer Intensive, a week-long professional development run by the school leader provides the foundation for lesson planning, a central and key component in improving student learning outcomes. As a result of all the strategic support, teachers both new and experienced speak to the progress they have made under the leadership of the school principal and assistant principal. Teachers are able to quickly implement suggestions and get consistent and immediate feedback. Better lessons lead to better learning as evidenced in strong January periodic assessment results on the integrated algebra, global history and English exams. On average, 92% of students passed the assessments with 72% earning an 80% or higher.
- The school is a safe place and fosters an inclusive culture where students are known well by adults in the building who work collaboratively to successfully support student's progress towards academic goals. (1.4)
 - o In addition to the campus security supports, the school created their own 5 person security team to handle issues in their school. Systems were established to cut down on lateness and cutting including strategic hallway placements for the security team along with clear Dean and Community Associate case loads to follow up with students who have referrals. The Principal reads referrals daily to keep abreast of situations and to help identify dean intervention verses guidance interventions. Due to the strategic work in this area, the amount of cutting went from 24% to 12% over the last 3 years.
 - o Counselors use a template to track and monitor conversations documenting current situations, steps taken, conversations, next steps, follow up dates, and follow up conversations. Counselors support both academic and social and

emotional needs of students. These focused conversations with counselors have led to clear action steps and support for students on understanding academic progress. Students are able to track their personal progress on school's Road to Graduation Tracker. Guidance counselors and teachers help students understand the need to be in class and on task more. As a result, the attendance rate went up over one full percentage point over the last year and college enrollment rates are over 10% higher than schools in the same peer index.

- School leaders and staff consistently convey high expectations to staff, students and parents with clear supports to assist in the achievement of these targets. (3.4)
 - o Teachers set measurable goals aligned to the clear expectations articulated in the school created Matrix for Effective Classroom Instruction. Teachers meet weekly with school leaders in order to plan and revise lessons that meet these expectations as well as to analyze student work samples in order to understand progress the teacher is making with students. These meetings are documented on Instructional Intensive Memorial Sheets which detail conversations as well as feedback and suggestions for improvement, ensuring that the teacher and coaching partner have mutual accountability for the work.
 - o Teachers, counselors and school leader convey high expectations for students through the implementation of Discovery High School Graduation requirements which expect all students to graduate with an advanced regents diploma. Communication of progress towards these expectations is communicated via Jupiter Grades, an online grading system, phone calls and regular progress reports. Detention and the SAVE room serve as consequences for students who are disruptive or not meeting the school's expectations. As a result 92% of students indicated on the School Survey that they have to work hard to get good grades at their school and nearly 90% of students said that adults in the school help them understand what they need to do to succeed. Additionally, 96% of teachers and 92% of parents felt that the school has high expectations for all students.
- A vast majority of teachers are engaged in professional collaborations using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improvement of student learning outcomes through the examination student and teacher work. (4.2)
 - o Teachers meet twice a week in departments using the school's Cycle for Improvement (an inquiry based cycle) to examine periodic assessment data, determine goals for targeted students, develop strategies to achieve goals, examine effectiveness of strategies and reflect on results. In departments, teachers worked together to create a common rubric for assessing Common Core Writing Standard 1, a focus standard for their work. As a result teachers in the English department and across the school have a better understanding of what Common Core aligned work looks like as they normed the rubric with student work. Additionally, grade teams meet once a week to examine data in order to identify students that are struggling across the grade level. Common strategies are designed, implemented and then assessed for targeted students. As a result of teacher collaborations, school wide systems such as RUT (Read the task, Underline key terms that explain what to do, T- To Do think about what you need to do to complete the task) and SGE (S- State your claim, G- Give evidence and examples, E- Explain how your evidence proves your claim) have enabled students to quickly become proficient at understanding directions for tasks and writing paragraphs using textual evidence to support claims.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue the process of aligning curriculum across grades and clearly articulating skills and content students need to demonstrate at each level so that the lowest and highest achieving students are cognitively engaged. (1.1)
 - o The school has identified some key standards including the development of arguments and use of informational texts to support claims that are being addressed across several content areas in order to promote post secondary readiness. However it is not clear how the standards progress in each content area across grade levels. There is no clear evidence of learning progressions across the grades. The school focuses heavily of the planning and refinement of lessons, assessments and strategies to meet the needs of identified struggling learners. That process has not yet been extended to ensure that the highest level students in each class are regularly being challenged to their highest ability. As a result there is lost opportunity to push high level learners (even those not identified for honors track classes) and ensure that they are constantly challenged.
- Further expand on classroom teaching strategies to include the facilitation of student led discussions and peer-collaborations that push students to extend and refine their thinking. (1.2)
 - o Teachers use a common template for lesson planning that requires them to articulate the instructional objective, standards, content, skills, procedure for the lesson, formative assessments, and homework. Across classrooms teaching strategies are consistently differentiated using flexible grouping, task and question variance and leveled texts. Models and exemplars are given to help guide students. All of these teacher moves ensures access for various learners. Across classrooms however, there is a lack of student voice and use of additional strategies such as discussion and the strategic use of questioning to push for high levels of student thinking and participation. In the vast majority of classrooms students worked independently on appropriately on tasks receiving feedback from their teachers. There are missed opportunities to engage students in debate, discussion, peer review and other collaborative work to push and refine thinking that impact student work products.
- Deepen action planning by developing interim goals and benchmarks for all plans so that progress and be measured, readjustments made and success evaluated at specific times throughout the year. (5.3)
 - o The school has clearly articulated action plans for both instructional and operational work. Goals are clearly articulated and supported by the school community. The English Department was clear that their goals are to support students around Common Core Writing Standard #1 by understanding the standards, creating tasks aligned to it and developing pedagogy to support the implementation of the tasks. However, when asked how they knew if they were meeting their goals, they were unclear about how they were measuring their effectiveness and their progress. While the school leader, teacher teams and teachers track data aligned to their goals on a regular basis, they have not yet articulated a pre-established vision for what progress towards their goals would look like at different points throughout the year. As a result, teacher teams do not yet have true ownership of their goals and goals setting systems are not as transparent as they could be.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: Discovery High School	UD	D	P	WD
Overall QR Score				X
Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?			X	
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best, and ensure that it is: aligned to the curriculum, engaging, and differentiated to enable all students to produce meaningful work products?			X	
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs as evidenced by meaningful student work products?				X
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X
Quality Statement 2 – Gather and Analyze Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, analyze and share information on student learning outcomes to understand school and student progress over time.				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?				X
2.2 Align assessments to curriculum, use on-going assessment practices and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom level?				X
2.3 Use grading policies and tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize, aggregate, and analyze student performance trends to inform instruction and curriculum?				X
2.4 Engage families in school decision-making, activities and an open exchange of information regarding students' progress toward school and class expectations?			X	
Quality Statement 3 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently engage the school community and use data to set and track suitably high goals for accelerating student learning.				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of future development that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are understood and supported by the entire school community?				X
3.2 Use collaborative and data informed processes to set measurable and differentiated learning goals for student subgroups, and students in need of additional support?				X
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?				X
3.4 Communicate high expectations to staff, students and families, and support students and families to achieve them?				X

Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals and student learning and emotional needs.

<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection, with a special focus on new teachers?				X
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?				X
4.3 Provide professional development that promotes independent and shared reflection, opportunities for leadership growth, and enables teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve learning outcomes?				X
4.4 Integrate child/youth development, guidance/advisement support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?				X

Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.

<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
5.1 Evaluate the quality of curricular, instructional and organizational decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS?				X
5.2 Evaluate systems for assessing students, organizing data, and sharing information with student and families, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?				X
5.3 Establish and sustain a transparent, collaborative system for measuring progress towards interim and long term goals and making adjustments during the year and over time?			X	
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?				X

Quality Review Scoring Key							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed